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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Thaci: Dialogue to resume in first part of September (*Epoka*)**

Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci, said on Sunday that the next high-level meeting in the dialogue for normalization of relations with Serbia will be held in the first part of September. Thaci told the paper that the topics of discussion between him and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic have not been set yet. “The first two meetings were more technical. I believe the next meeting will create a basis for discussions on the future,” he said. Thaci also called on opposition parties in Kosovo to join the process. “It is important for dialogue to continue, to reach a solution so that Kosovo can move forward toward membership of the NATO and the EU,” Thaci said.

**Drawing of borders, without the opposition (*Zeri*)**

The paper reports on its front page that in a few weeks, Kosovo and Serbia Presidents are scheduled to meet in Brussels in the final phase of dialogue. At the meeting, Thaci is expected to present his plan on “border adjustments” aiming to join Presevo Valley with Kosovo. The opposition however will not join Thaci at the meeting. Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) MP, Imet Rrahmani, said the meeting is important “only for the President’s personal agenda”. According to Rrahmani, “it is naive to expect anything substantial from this meeting. It will be a similar meeting with the previous ones, with lot of uncertainties, empty statements, and only for internal public in Kosovo and Serbia.”

**Bugajski: U.S. and EU are using test balloons (*Koha*)**

U.S. analyst on the Balkans, Janusz Bugajski, said in an interview to the paper that the process of division or exchange of territories between Kosovo and Serbia would require the implementation of at least four requirements: mutual recognition, a decision by parliament or people’s referendum, international mediation and aid for people affected by the exchange of territories. According to Bugajski, “both Pristina and Belgrade seem to be responding in a way to some kind of green light from Washington and Brussels to discuss the potential exchange of territories. President Thaci clearly wants to bring Presevo into the discussion and not face the possibility of just giving away northern Kosovo”. Bugajski also recalls that the U.S. and EU have constantly opposed border changes believing that such moves could pose a threat to a region that is already fragile. “The relative silence over the last couple of weeks is an indication that Washington and Brussels are maybe using a test balloon to see on what Belgrade and Pristina could agree upon, without direct international intervention,” he added.

**Weber: Germany is the new U.S. for Kosovo (*Koha*)**

Bodo Weber, Senior Associate of the Democratization Policy Council concentrating on the Western Balkans, said in an interview to the paper on Sunday that he hopes German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s recent statement on “no border changes” in the Balkans will end “the dangerous and self-destructive pace in the Kosovo – Serbia dialogue, which we have seen unfold for almost a year now”. Asked to comment on the silence from EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and the EU on the matter, Weber said: “I’m afraid that the initial position of the EU External Service in the early new phase of dialogue which was ‘it is not our role to set red lines’ and which seems not to have evolved sufficiently to seriously initiate negotiations on a final agreement, is not based on such political questions and opinions, but rather on a bureaucratic mindset that prevails in Brussels whenever there is lack of political leadership. Such a traditional bureaucratic performance is not surprising from Mogherini’s team – but it is frustrating to see the lack of commitment and political understanding from Mogherini. I really hope she will finally understand the political challenge and the personal opportunity for future negotiations on a final agreement. Otherwise I’m afraid we won’t see the start of real and substantial negotiations before the new European Commission next year”.

**Ragmi Mustafa: Thaci’s statement on border adjustments, late (*EO/Zeri*)**

Ragmi Mustafa, leader of the Democratic Party of Albanians in Presevo Valley, told ***Ekonomia Online*** that Kosovo President Hashim Thaci’s remarks on “border adjustments” are late but that his idea is nonetheless encouraging. “His statements however are much encouraging, because the President is seriously dealing at the same time with Pristina-Belgrade dialogue and with implementation of the March 1992 referendum of the Albanians in Presheva, Medvedje, and Bujanovc, associating unification of those three Albanian majority municipalities to the Republic of Kosovo,” Mustafa stated.

**Hoxha: Visa liberalization recommendation on EU’s agenda now (*RTK*)**

Dhurata Hoxha, Kosovo’s Minister for European Integration, told *RTK* on Sunday that Kosovo authorities received confirmation that the European Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), has included in its agenda the recommendation for visa liberalization for Kosovo. The Committee is scheduled to meet at the end of this month. “All EU institutions should put Kosovo on their agenda in order to reach certain deadlines by the end of the year. Kosovo has met all the requirements... but we will continue our work,” Hoxha was quoted as saying. She added that reforms in the judiciary must continue. “Kosovo needs to continue reforms in the rule of law and other sectors. We must continuously demonstrate our commitment in the fight against corruption as this would be the best signal to EU institutions.”

**€10 million per year for war deserters (*Koha*)**

The paper reports on its leading front-page story that around €10 million are paid annually for people who deserted from the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) before the end of the war and that over 80 per cent of deserters are from the Dukagjini region. The paper notes that this information was included in the indictment on “false war veterans” which was submitted by Elez Blakaj, now former special prosecutor, before he resigned. The State Prosecution meanwhile has said that this is a draft-indictment. Blakaj qualified as fake thousands of applications which were filled by the same handwriting. Around eight thousand people of Dukagjini region has gained the status of the KLA veteran unlawfully. 40 per cent of them have deserted during the war. Moreover, there are 230 veterans from the Dukagjini region who during the war were minors. There are even people who gained the status of veteran, but who were only 7 years old during the period of the war.

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